

Beginning next month, the United States will initiate the withdrawal of 10,000 troops from Afghanistan to be completed by year's end, setting in motion a process to bring home 33,000 American military personnel by the summer of 2012. This decision was announced last Wednesday night during a primetime address by President Obama.

The president's orders represent a significant turn in the direction of U.S. military involvement in Afghanistan, which began with air strikes in the weeks after the September 11, 2001 terror attacks and has expanded to a force of approximately 100,000 American military today.

To be clear, President Obama's decision to bring home 33,000 U.S. troops from Afghanistan does not constitute the bulk of U.S. military currently deployed in the south Asian nation. Even after the 33,000 have left, 67,000 U.S. military personnel will remain stationed in the country, although their counterinsurgency mission will change with the reduction of forces.

The president's announcement effectively signals the end of the U.S. surge force that he implemented in December of 2009 in response to the Taliban and Al Qaeda resurgence in southern Afghanistan. Having traveled to Afghanistan twice – both before and after the surge was put into place – I believe the increase in U.S. military personnel was necessary and has been effective in turning the tide and allowing space for Afghan army and police units to establish control.

Admiral Mike Mullen, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, said last week that the surge has made progress. "The strategy is working. Al Qaeda is on their heels, and the Taliban's momentum in the south has been checked. We have made extraordinary progress against the mission we have been assigned, and are, therefore, now in a position to begin a responsible transition out of Afghanistan."

One important point Admiral Mullen made is while he supports President Obama's decision to withdraw the surge force, he also conceded that the president's plans "are more aggressive and incur more risk than I was originally prepared to accept." "More force for more time is, without a doubt, the safer course."

When the president announced the surge back in December of 2009 he also set in motion a timetable to evaluate its effectiveness, which according to Admiral Mullen, is on schedule. However, the size and timing of the drawdown remains a concern for many. I share that view.

The United States has invested ten years, billions of dollars, and most importantly, the lives of over 1,500 American military in our effort to deny Al Qaeda and its Taliban backers a safe haven in Afghanistan. As our military commanders can attest, our brave and dedicated military personnel have made substantial gains in their mission objectives. Afghanistan today is far less likely to host terrorists such as Al Qaeda who could directly threaten the U.S. and our allies. That said, we must be doubly certain that each step we take does not risk the precious gains we've made.

It is critical that any decision to withdraw U.S. surge forces from Afghanistan be based upon the fulfillment of our military objectives and not further endanger our military personnel stationed in harm's way. Equally, it is vitally important that our nation's security interests be placed first, ahead of political goals.

The president should listen to our commanders and allow them the flexibility to anticipate and respond to further threats on the ground. To do otherwise risks not only the lives of our own personnel and the gains we've made, but also jeopardizes the ability of the Afghan government to assume control over their own country.

### **Congress Still Awaits Justification for U.S. Military Action in Libya:**

One key distinction separating America's military operations in Libya and Afghanistan is that of Congressional approval. In 2001, President Bush sought and received the support of the House and Senate for the war in Afghanistan. President Obama has not done the same with the three-month U.S. military campaign in Libya. Not only has the president failed to secure congressional approval, but so far he has not provided adequate justification that American involvement in Libya is in our national interest.

The Constitution grants Congress, not the president, the responsibility to declare war and the ability to control the federal purse strings. Last Friday, the U.S. House held a vote to limit funding for U.S. support of NATO-led military operations in Libya to non-combat missions. I

supported this measure and was disappointed it was not passed by the full House.

The facts, however, have not changed – the president owes Congress and the American people a better explanation of our strategic goals in Libya.

My staff and I work for you. If we can ever be of service, do not hesitate to call my office toll free at 1-800-288-8721.